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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 FREETOWN 000127

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP, CA/VO/KCC  
ACRA FOR DHS  
FRANKFURT FOR RCO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CMGT CVIS CPAS ASEC KFRD SL  
SUBJECT: Fraud Summary - Freetown

Ref: 08 STATE 074840

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Country Conditions  
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11. Freetown is a high fraud post. Despite much progress since the end of an 11-year civil war in 2001, Sierra Leone is ranked last on the UN Human Development Index. As such, socioeconomic conditions for many residents are poor and many people seek a better life elsewhere. There is a large diaspora of Sierra Leoneans throughout the world, especially in the U.S. and UK. Sierra Leoneans often expect, and receive, remittances from extended family members living in wealthier countries. Furthermore, many Sierra Leoneans will try to join their family members abroad, legally or illegally. Corruption is present at all levels of society, particularly in government. It is therefore easy to obtain authentic documents with false information, sometimes by bribing officials.

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NIV Fraud  
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12. Most NIV fraud consists of false bank statements and invitation letters. This usually results in a 214(b) refusal rather than a formal investigation by the Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU). However, over half of NIV cases referred to the FPU are confirmed as fraud. B visas constitute eighty-four percent of all applications. Of the rest, only F visas (6.1%), G visas (2.8%), and A visas (2.2%) each exceed two percent of the visa caseload. Within these categories, the most disconcerting is relationship fraud for official and diplomatic dependents. Diplomats and officials, including very high-level emissaries, commonly make fraudulent claims regarding biological and adopted children in order to bring them to the U.S. These claims are always supported by Notes Verbale, which are another area of concern to us and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Post has received both unauthorized and fraudulent Notes Verbale supporting official and non-official visa applications. Students typically apply for visas to attend schools selected due to a family member living nearby or being on the school staff, suggesting the possibility that the student application is a cover for intending immigrants. Students can rarely explain their rationale in selecting a university. Several of the relatively few high school student exchange visitors and conference participants have not returned from the U.S., with or without attending the intended program first. Little-known and unvetted Sierra Leonean organizations usually find program participants, and are likely responsible for organizing the alien smuggling under the unwitting aegis of well-meaning, established U.S. entities.

Document fraud is very common. Official documents are rarely forged since authentic documents with false information are easily obtained. For example, late or delayed birth certificates based on reports from the "parents" are often issued many years after the

child is born. With this birth certificate, a passport is obtained.

At least once a month, IDENT and FR hits uncover an applicant with a second identity.

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IV Fraud  
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13. Embassy Dakar processes Sierra Leone's Immigrant Visas.

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DV Fraud  
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14. Embassy Abidjan processed Sierra Leone's Diversity Visas until the last week of the reporting period. Embassy Freetown did not process enough DV cases in this reporting period to comment significantly.

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ACS and U.S. Passport Fraud  
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15. There has been little U.S. passport fraud, other than occasional photocopies of U.S. passports of alleged inviting relatives presented during visa interviews. One imposter was turned back twice at the local airport with someone else's U.S. passport, before the passport was returned to the Embassy. The supposed mother of this imposter also came to the Embassy claiming an older sister was born in the United States, and thus eligible for a passport.

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Adoption Fraud  
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16. Embassy Dakar processes Sierra Leone's adoptions.

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Use of DNA Testing  
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17. Due to CRBA cases often coming from non-traditional family situations and unreliable birth certificates, DNA testing is recommended in about 70% of cases. In about 15-20% of those, the blood relationship has been disproved, and in about 10% of cases, applicants have abandoned the application after DNA testing was recommended. Post also handles DNA testing for DHS upon request, but does not usually receive the results.

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Asylum and Other DHS Benefit Fraud  
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18. V92 and V93 cases are not processed by Embassy Freetown. Most are processed by Embassy Conakry or Embassy Dakar. Embassy Freetown also receives many requests for transportation letters from LPRs who have lost or stolen I-551s. Airline security denied boarding to several imposters using other persons' I-551s.

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Alien Smuggling, Trafficking, Organized Crime, Terrorist Travel  
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19. Post has seen several instances of alien smuggling where an adult chaperone accompanies teenagers ostensibly bringing students for an exchange program or conference. In some instances where the visas were issued, the children never returned.

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DS Criminal Fraud Investigations  
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110. The consular section referred only one issue--a bribe offer to a LES--in the last six months to RSO for investigation. The

referral was handled informally over e-mail. RSO is still investigating.

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Host Country Passport, Identity Documents, and Civil Registry  
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11. PASSPORT: The Sierra Leonean passport in production since 2001 has a machine-readable bio page with a photo-digitized picture (large and small) and signature. Older passports were declared obsolete in 2002. Post does not have any specimens. Applicants must present a birth certificate and national ID card and, in theory, come for an interview. However, false breeder documents are easily obtained and are not verified by the Immigration Office. There are three passports: regular (passport numbers beginning with the letter "O"), service (passport numbers beginning with "S"), and diplomatic (passport letters beginning with "D"). The three passport types are very similar except for the word "Service" or "Diplomatic" on the cover above "Passport." All inside pages have watermarks and the passport number hole-punched at the top. Passports contain the following UV luminescent features:

- Cross-hatching on inside covers
- Crest and hidden lion on inside front cover
- Hidden passport number on page 1 (regular passports only)
- Page numbers and a square at the edge of each page, starting at the top and moving down each page until the center of the book, then back up.
- Sierra Leone Crest at the bottom of each page and "Republic of Sierra Leone" near the top.
- Monochrome binding string, between pages 16 and 17.

ID CARD: Government contractors produced machine-readable National ID cards from 2000 to 2004. The GoSL has not contracted a new company to produce them yet. While there are theoretically records of these cards, since the contractor is not involved anymore, there is no way to verify them. Older, non-machine-readable, cards had no records at all. Both cards are easily photo-subbed. In lieu, the National Registration Secretariat now issues letters signed by the Chief or Deputy Registrar and with a passport size photo attached, asking the bearer to be excused of any requirement for an ID card. The letter is not laminated, nor is it registered, allowing for very easy forgery and nearly impossible registration.

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BIRTH CERTIFICATES: Birth certificates come in several varieties, depending on when the birth is registered:

- 0 to 30 days: original
- 31 days to 1 year: late
- Over 1 year: delayed

Certified true copies, which are transcriptions of the information in the registers rather than facsimiles of the original certificate, are available. Often, the registrar's office will issue a delayed certificate instead of a certified copy as they can charge more for the delayed certificate and it does not require a record check. Also, applicants may obtain a delayed certificate with false information. All birth certificates are printed on paper stock with a single-colored pattern background. The registrar fills the data in handwriting, and then stamps and signs. While post occasionally sees forged birth certificates, authentic certificates with false information are so easy to obtain that the latter are much more common.

Most Sierra Leoneans do not register births, especially if the child is born outside of a hospital or health center. At the hospitals and health centers, nurses record births but parents must take these forms to the nearest Office of the Registrar of Births and Deaths for registration, which most parents fail to do. Some parents do not have birth records because most provincial records were destroyed during the war. In order to give a fair chance to those who were not registered and to facilitate registration of births, there was a mass free registration of children aged 0 to 18 on June

20 to 21, 2003 in commemoration of the Day of The African Child. All birth certificates issued during this period had the prefix "DAC" followed by a number. Records for DAC registrations are unreliable difficult to access, and therefore especially prone to fraud.

**DEATH CERTIFICATES:** Death certificates are equally easy to obtain. Birth and death certificates are issued by the Office of the Registrar of Births and Deaths, which has a head office in downtown Freetown and sub-registries at health centers in other parts of Freetown and the provincial towns and villages. In theory, one should present a medical report of death and can give information on the death orally or in writing. If done orally, the registrar enters the information in the prescribed form, reads it out to informant and asks the informant to sign. This should be done within fourteen days of the death so that the Registrar can issue a burial permit.

**EDUCATIONAL DOCUMENTS:** West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) and the preceding General Certificate of Education Ordinary Levels (GCE O-Levels) statements of result, issued by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), are perhaps the sole Sierra Leonean documents that are easily and reliably verifiable. The WAEC country director insists that all statements of results for U.S. visa purposes go through Embassy Freetown, so other posts should not accept results presented directly by the applicant. The WASSCE replaced the GCE O-Levels in 2000, and can be verified online using a cheap prepaid scratch-off card. About 30 percent of certificates checked are false. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to distinguish results between multiple people with the same name, leaving the door open for fraud. WAEC's other exams, taken after primary school (NPSE) and ninth grade (BECCE) can be equally checked at the WAEC office. Other school records are far less reliable and very prone to fraud as applicants frequently bribe school officials or generate documents from schools which do not keep sufficient records.

**REGISTRIES:** When registry volumes are full, they are sent to the Freetown main office, allowing the FPU to verify registrations relatively easily. However, verification of certificates only proves that the events are properly registered, not that they actually took place. Among birth and death certificates verified, over 90 percent come back as properly registered, but field investigations often prove that registered events never occurred.

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Cooperation with Host Government Authorities  
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**¶12.** Post has interacted with host government authorities on a limited basis on fraud matters. Post has established new, more stringent, verification procedures with the Administrator and Registrar-General, who supervises marriage, divorce, business, and property records. Given the generally ineffective and often corrupt local judiciary, reliable fraud prosecution is unlikely.

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Areas of Particular Concern  
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**¶13.** All areas of concern have been addressed elsewhere in this telegram.

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Staffing and Training  
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**¶14.** The Deputy Consular Section Chief serves as Fraud Prevention Manager in addition to his other duties, including managing the new IV unit, adjudicating visas and providing American citizen services. He has not received any formal fraud training beyond what is included in the Basic Consular Course. There are two FPU LES staff. The senior of the two also handles federal benefits services, and is the lead cashier on DV days, though these duties will transfer to

the future full-time cashier. Both FPU LES staff have taken the FSN Fraud Prevention Workshop (PC542) at FSI and Detecting Fraudulent Documents (PC544) online. The FPU primarily handles the large load of investigations for IV cases from Dakar, DV cases from Abidjan (recently transferred to post), V92/V93 cases from Conakry, and various requests from DHS in petition or adjustment of status cases.

The caseload can at times be overwhelming, particularly when the annual DV deadline approaches.

PERRY